

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

English language is considered as a very important subject in secondary schools in Malaysia. However, the standard of achievements amongst the students is still very poor especially in rural secondary schools. Results from the Government Exams such as PMR and SPM have shown that students in secondary schools perform poorly in English subject. Because of this, numerous efforts have been taken by the ministry of Education to overcome it. Several programs like ‘Extra English Tuition’, ‘Class Tuition Albukhary’, ‘Etems’ and ‘EST’ have been introduced.

Despite all these efforts, the results were still not very encouraging. The Minister of Education, Dato ‘Hishamuddin Tun Hussein (2005) stated that the levels of achievement among the secondary schools students in English language were still unsatisfactory. Many students were still facing problems in speaking and writing in English due to the lack of interest and exposure in using the language.

The problems faced by the students affect the students’ English results in the PMR and SPM examinations. Hence, it is hoped that by introducing a strategy like Cooperative learning will help to enhance students’ achievement in English language acquisition in secondary schools.

Cooperative learning is described as a large group of instructional strategies in which students collaborate in order to reach a common goal. Cooperative learning has been practiced throughout human history and is a part of educational practice. Its effectiveness has been documented through numerous research studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1986; Kagan, 1986; Slavin, 1988).

Daniel et al (1991) stated that cooperative learning is now widely recognized as one of the most promising practices in the educational field. Olsen & Chen (1998) also pointed out that many of the originators of cooperative learning emphasized on the importance of heterogeneity in forming groups in the classroom where non-English speakers and native English speakers were members of the same group.

Based on Sapon-Shevin's study (1994), he found out that Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy at all levels, from pre-school to post secondary. He further stated that Cooperative learning groups do not separate students on the basis of class, race, or gender and the goals of middle schools are consistent with the goals of Cooperative learning theories. Cooperative learning is a peer-centered pedagogy that can promote academic achievement and build positive social relationships (Sapon-Shevin, 1994).

Because of the significant achievement in using Cooperative learning in the classroom by many researchers, this study will focus on the relationship between Cooperative learning and students' achievement in English language acquisition in a literature class in secondary school. Students need to acquire the skills of learning English literature so that they can answer the questions in the PMR and SPM English papers.

1.2 Background of the Study

Secondary school students, especially from rural areas in Sarawak, always face major difficulties in acquiring English. They come from different backgrounds, cultures, education and language proficiency. Based on the researcher and his colleagues' experiences, it was found that the exposure of rural students in English language occurs mainly in the classroom. They hardly speak English outside the classroom. Instead, they speak in their mother tongue to their family members at home and to their friends in their communities. They do not like learning English because they think that English language is a very difficult subject and they do not have the interest to learn and acquire it. This affects the students' English performance in the PMR and SPM examination.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Students in Secondary schools face a lot of problems with their English in terms of grammar and vocabulary. The level of their English proficiency is low. Continuous observation revealed that this situation existed due to the lack of exposure to English in their daily life, as well as lack of interest in learning and using English. Furthermore, they do not have much interest in reading materials in English language because they do not understand what is being read. Therefore, they perform badly in their public examinations like PMR and SPM. Furthermore, recent statistics from the education department showed that the secondary school was the beginning of a high rate of dropouts. Therefore, it is hoped that cooperative learning can enhance students' achievement in their acquisition of English language.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the relationship between cooperative learning and achievement in English language acquisition in a literature class amongst Form 4 students in a secondary school.

1.5 Objective of the study

This study is to find out whether cooperative learning can improve the students' English language acquisition in a literature class in a secondary school.

1.6 Research Questions

The research questions to be answered in this study are as follows:

- i. Is there any relationship between cooperative learning method in an English literature class and students' achievement in acquiring English Language?
- ii. If there is relationship, is this relationship positive or negative?

iii. In what aspects does the positive or negative relationship affect students' learning of the English language?

1.7 Significance of the study

This study benefits the participating school, the subject teacher as well as the subjects of the study.

The participating school will benefit because the results will be a guideline for the teachers to determine the specific difficulty encountered by the students in acquiring English. The teachers can find ways to improve their teaching methods. The subject teacher will benefit since he is actively involved in the study. He can discover some of the problems faced by the students and continue to rectify the problems.

The students can gain a lot of benefits because cooperative learning approach can give students the chance to develop positive and productive relationships. It gives students opportunities to learn from one another rather than receive information from the teacher or text alone.

It was also hoped that by discovering this relationship, the students would benefit in terms of English language acquisition. There is a possibility that the success of those

few could be extended to the others in the same circumstances. Therefore, this could help overcome the problem of students having low English language proficiency in secondary schools.

1.8 Limitation of the study

The study is limited in several factors. Firstly, the size of the sample is small. The research was conducted only in one Form 4 class in a secondary school. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is also limited by the small scale of the study. There might be extraneous variables that can invariably affect the findings such as the cultural and educational background of the students, thus affecting the reliability of the findings.

Time constraint was another limitation. It is impossible for the researcher to carry out an extensive study in such a short period of time. The respondents were not able to get enough practice in the class especially the interpersonal and small group skills. Due to the time-constraints, the actual time needed for each activity had to be shortened and this might have effects on the outcome of the lessons conducted.